

FEATURE

Five years after failing...

Recruit claims title with help of former platoon-mate



Lance Cpl. Jennifer Brofer
Recruit Jennifer Hoppes helps another recruit negotiate her way over Cukela’s Wall during Event One of the Crucible Aug. 26. When Hoppes, who originally came to the Depot in May of 1998, returned earlier this year to try again to claim the title of Marine, she was surprised to see one of the Marines she went to recruit training with the first time as her drill instructor.

LANCE CPL. JENNIFER BROFER
STAFF WRITER

In May 1998, she stepped onto the infamous yellow footprints, like thousands had before her, and wanted nothing more than to follow in her father’s footsteps and earn the coveted title of United States Marine.

After making it more than halfway through her training, she was dropped from her platoon, having failed to qualify on the rifle range, then discharged due to family problems back home. Her dream was shattered, but she refused to admit defeat.

Five years later, she summoned up the courage to return to Parris Island and try again. This time, she succeeded.

Today, Pfc. Jennifer Hoppes graduated with Platoon 4027, Papa Co., 4th RTBn., finally realizing her dream. Coincidentally, one of the drill instructors, who helped transform her from a recruit into a Marine, was actually a fellow recruit with her five years ago. This meant she not only had to deal with the mental and physical challenges that went along with recruit training, but also the fact that she had to call someone “ma’am,” who once bore the title of “recruit” at the same time she did.

“Her platoon was marching by and I saw her with the guidon ... I saw her face and I knew I had recognized her from somewhere,” said Sgt. Karen Hogan, Hoppes’ drill instructor and former fellow recruit. “I just looked at her a minute and I thought ‘I went to bootcamp with her! Why is she back here?’”

This time, Hoppes started out with November Co., but after failing to qualify at the rifle range, she was dropped again—this time to Papa Co. with Hogan’s platoon.

“I didn’t even recognize her when I first saw her—she recognized me,” said the Cape Coral, Fla., native. “I had heard that she was asking questions about me and that she was proud of me for having the guts to do this again.”

Even more amazing was the fact that Hoppes was dropped to Series 4026, the same series she and Hogan were in during their first time on the Island.

“When I found out about being in [Hogan’s] platoon, that was pretty nerve wracking,” she said. “I wondered how that would work out, and if she would treat me different than everybody else.”

It was not only shocking for Hoppes, but also for the Marine on the other side of the yellow footprints. Still, Hogan insisted that their acquaintance never caused her to treat Hoppes any differently from the other recruits.

“It was awkward, but I gave her no special treatment—none. [The recruits] all hate me,” said Hogan laughingly.

Hoppes admitted there was an air of awkwardness in the beginning.

“For about two weeks she didn’t really talk [to me] at all,” she said.

But after their initial unease, things eventually returned to normal and their roles of recruit and drill instructor solidified.

“[Hogan] was very tough,” said Hoppes. “Someone once told me that [Hogan] could see potential in me as a good Marine and that’s why she was hard on me.”

While in training, Hoppes’ additional experience proved advantageous and helped her gain the billet of Guide for a time, although some of the aspects of recruit training remained a challenge for her.

“It was still hard getting used to all the yelling, and I had a hard time at the rifle range, but I made it,” said the 25-year-old,



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Sergeant Karen Hogan went through recruit training with Hoppes in 1998 and is now her drill instructor. Hogan will graduate her new Marines, including Hoppes, today.

who qualified as a marksman after two failed attempts.

Nowadays, Hoppes looks forward to continuing her training and leaving the Island, the place where, five years ago, she vowed she’d return to in order to claim victory no matter how long it would take.

Though having Hogan as a drill instructor was rather odd, her presence, among others, helped her to press on through the hard times at home and in training, she said.

“I really admire the drill instructors,” said Hoppes one week before her graduation. “They encouraged me even through all the problems I had. I was really down and they were really worried for me, but I came out of it and I’m really looking forward to actually graduating and moving on.”

Despite the stresses that confronted her, Hoppes continued to push on, encompassing the phrase, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again,” for it wasn’t until after she stepped on those infamous yellow footprints for the second time that she was able to march across the parade deck a Marine.

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